



News Release

MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE BALTIMORE CITY HEALTH DEPARTMENT PARTNER TO HELP CHILDREN

BALTIMORE, MD (September 8, 2006) –The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) in partnership with the Baltimore City Health Department calls on the public to stop using the cosmetic black powdered substance called Surma (kohl). This material may contain very high levels of lead. Surma (Kohl) cosmetics may often be applied to the eyes of children. It is also used as a teething powder for infants.

The Maryland Department of the Environment plans to notify all Maryland local health departments about the concern of Surma (Kohl) and its effects on children. MDE performs environmental investigations for children with elevated blood lead levels. In some of the investigations no typical source of lead is discovered and tenants are asked questions about the possible use of non-traditional remedies. There is evidence that some of these remedies contain hazardous levels of lead, particularly Surma. In recent investigations, inspectors determined that Surma was used on children with elevated blood lead levels. The parents were advised to stop using Surma. The Maryland Department of the Environment has referred this issue to the Office of the Attorney General 's Consumer Protection Division

“Lead is one of the most significant and widespread environmental hazards for children in Maryland but exposure is preventable,” states Jonas Jacobson Deputy Secretary Maryland Department of the Environment. “Although there continues to be a steady decline in childhood lead exposure in Maryland, the goal of protecting children from lead poisoning in Maryland by 2010 will only be accomplished with the cooperation of local health departments and the public.”

The reduction of children with lead poisoning has occurred both statewide and in areas of highest risk such as Baltimore City. Non-standard sources of lead, such as Surma, some candies from Mexico, and some metal trinkets for children, take on an increasing role in the lead poisoning problem as lead paint sources are reduced and eliminated.

“The Baltimore City Health Department is pleased to be working with MDE to ensure that we are protecting children from lead hazards,” explains Dr. Joshua M. Sharfstein Commissioner “Parents need to be vigilant about how young children can come in contact with lead and the products that could contain lead.”

The Baltimore City Health Commissioner is issuing an order barring the sale of Kohl containing cosmetic products in the city. MDE obtained two containers of Surma - one was purchased in a specialty market in Baltimore City. The material was sent to a private laboratory for testing. The results showed that the two samples contained nearly 750 times the national limit for lead (39 percent and 45 percent lead by weight). As a comparison, lead-based paint is defined in the Maryland lead regulations as having 0.5 percent lead by weight. The current national standard for paint limits any lead to 0.06 percent by weight.

Children are at the greatest risk from birth to age six while their neurological systems are being developed. Exposure to lead can cause long-term neurological damage that may be associated with learning and behavioral problems and with decreased intelligence.

Additional information is available from MDE:

www.mde.state.md.us/Programs/LandPrograms/LeadCoordination/index.asp and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency www.epa.gov/lead/

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